



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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West Nile Virus Surveillance to Begin June 1

BISMARCK, N.D. – On June 1 the North Dakota Department of Health – in conjunction with several local, state, federal and private agencies – will begin West Nile virus surveillance activities for 2015. Surveillance includes reporting and testing sick horses and other domestic animals, trapping and testing mosquitoes, monitoring illness in humans, and reporting and testing dead birds.

“West Nile virus is transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito,” said Michelle Feist, Program Manager with the North Dakota Department of Health. “In North Dakota, the greatest risk for West Nile virus transmission occurs during the months of July and August when the *Culex tarsalis* mosquito, the mosquito that transmits the disease, is more abundant.”

Most people infected with West Nile virus experience no symptoms or have only mild symptoms, such as fever and headache. The more serious form of the illness, West Nile neuroinvasive disease, can cause symptoms of high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, altered mental status and death. People over 50 or those who have underlying health issues are at greater risk for developing the neuroinvasive disease than others.

In 2014, the NDDoH received reports that 23 people tested positive for West Nile virus. Of those 23, eight were hospitalized and one died. West Nile infection was also identified in one cow, one horse and two moose. There are no vaccinations that protect people from the virus, and there are no specific treatments for the disease.

Officials cannot predict the severity of any given year’s West Nile virus season. The intensity of West Nile virus activity depends on a variety of factors, including the weather, the number of birds and mosquitoes that maintain and spread the virus, and human behavior. It is important to note that since surveillance began in 2002, a human case has been reported in every county in the state.

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Visit the health department home page at www.ndhealth.gov.

NDDoH recommends residents take these precautions to avoid mosquito bites:

- Use insect repellents containing ingredients registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – such as DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus (or PMD) or permethrin – and apply according to manufacturer’s instructions
- Wear protective clothing, such as long-sleeved shirts and pants
- Limit outdoor activities between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most likely to bite
- Eliminate stagnant water in containers around homes where mosquitoes can lay their eggs (such as buckets, flowerpots, old tires, wading pools and birdbaths)
- Keep the grass around your home trimmed

For more information about West Nile virus, contact Michelle Feist, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378 or visit www.ndhealth.gov/wnv.

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